THE REAL WORK OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

An Address Delivered to the Australian Section Convention in March 1970

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PERHAPS the most useful subject to discuss at a Convention like this would be the real work of the Theosophical Society especially in relation to the present times. The Society was not founded as a movement to teach people to be good in the conventional sense—that is, not rob, murder, deceive, or perpetrate such patently injurious acts as unfortunately are very prevalent in these days. Nor was this Society meant to be a school of Occultism. A letter from one of the Mahatmas makes that very clear. He says: 'Rather perish the T. S. with both its hapless Founders than that we should permit it to become no better than an academy of magic, a hall of occultism.' These are

striking and ringing words. Nor is the Society meant merely to satisfy intellectual curiosity, afford a forum to amuse ourselves, when we feel bored, by discussing various intellectual themes. It was founded with the exalted purpose of promoting the spiritual regeneration of man. But then we have to understand what this regeneration means and how it is to take place.

The first Object, the universal brotherhood of humanity, which was introduced some years after the Society came into existence, was insisted upon by the Adepts as a necessary base for the promotion of its high aim, namely the radical transformation of man, his whole nature, mode of conduct and future. If we bear this in mind, then we can find out what line of activity would be most worth pursuing at any time. There are members who say: 'We have the three Objects of the Society; are they not sufficient?' They are comprehensive and therefore they must be pronounced to be sufficient. But then they are so worded, so elastically phrased, that almost any good work, whether humanitarian, or intellectual, or of the nature of psychic

research, can be brought under their blanket. There are many other bodies engaged along these lines. Are we merely to duplicate their work along lines intellectual, philosophical, psycho-analytical, spiritualistic, and so forth? Or is it something else to which we are called? The universal brotherhood is an idea now accepted fairly widely, even though it is accepted only verbally and not in practice. But then there are our critics, and their charge has a certain validity, that we ourselves merely make this universal brotherhood a motto to be realized in due course. When we say 'in due course' it gives us an indefinite length of time; all sense of urgency disappears. We can come to it as gradually as we like, without suffering any inconvenience.

If we take the second Object, the study of comparative religion, science and philosophy, we find that there are innumerable academic bodies which are engaged in just doing that. They compare Hinduism with Buddhism, Christianity with Mithraism, and what not, and they aim at pointing out similarities and dissimilarities between these different systems of thought. Also, they correlate the ideas of

Science with those of Philosophy, ancient or modern, as a purely intellectual exercise. But where does all that lead to? Our life goes on in much the same fashion as before with its sorrows, problems, emptiness and frivolity. There are also numerous societies engaged in psychical research, of one sort or another.

What is it specially to which we have to address ourselves, at this crucial point in the unfoldment of human affairs? This is a question which is not to be answered only by me or some one else but to be addressed by each member of the Society to himself, so that he may come to an understanding of his own, which understanding perhaps will enlarge as he proceeds. The mere acceptance of a statement from somebody who may sound clever, or who may speak fluently, or who may have some kind of status, will not help the movement.

The Word Theosophy

The more carefully one considers this question the more surely one will come to the realization that it is the word Theosophy, contained in the very title of the Society,

that indicates to us the character of the work in which we should be engaged. Significantly enough, this Theosophy is left completely undefined. Yet in its literal meaning it can be as a glittering star on the horizon towards which our work can be oriented, the vibrations from which can penetrate our hearts and be transmitted through our lives, through every word and action.

Theosophy, translated literally, is the Divine Wisdom. But what is divine? We cannot say that whatever we may have in mind as an idea represents what is divine. What we think to be divine is possibly only a projection from a previous background. It may not be divine. It is in most cases an image projected from a background of reactions, highly limited and conditioned. Ask anyone belonging to any of the various schools or sects, and he will tell you what he thinks is divine according to the ideas of his school. But it is just his concept or belief; there is no particular validity attached to it.

Then, what is wisdom, which of course is much more within our comprehension? We have to realize that wisdom is not knowledge, no

matter how recondite the matters it comprises. Nothing can be more recondite than the elementary particles of which science speaks at present and of which there has been a bewildering variety appearing during the last few years. One can have a great deal of knowledge with regard to them or something else that is beyond the average man's horizon of comprehension. We can have very detailed knowledge of the chains and rounds and globes that constitute the cycle of the human or subhuman life-wave, but all that will not necessarily make a man wise.

Heaven-Born Wisdom

A person may be extremely learned, thoroughly fixed in his learning, absolutely sure about what he thinks he knows, yet unable to get on with his wife and children. Would you call him wise, or lacking in wisdom? Surely knowledge of the ordinary sort will not make a man wise. He may be versed in theology or science, or occultism in certain of its aspects, but all that will not enable him to think rightly on matters which pertain to his own life, his relationship with

people. If we have a touch of true wisdom, we will know that wisdom has a different flavour from knowledge of facts of which we make conceptual images. Images of things are like furniture, or drawings or paintings on the walls of consciousness. They are there only to look at, but the person in their midst is making the same motions. Surely that is not the mark of wisdom.

Wisdom belongs to the soul of man and it has a different quality, a different fragrance, being something out of this world. It is heaven-born. All these words sound rather poetical but I feel they are strictly true. With regard to matters we may call spiritual, what sounds poetical can also be true. It can be the poetry of truth, not mere fancy. The whole test of wisdom lies in whether a person is acting according to the truth of things or according to various fancies, imaginings, illusions that he may be cherishing. If he acts in conformity with the actual facts, whether at the physical level or the psychic or any higher or deeper level, then he is acting wisely. But if he pursues a will-o'-the-wisp, a phantom, an illusory light, fancies which rise into the air

like so much smoke and eventually get diffused and lost, then surely he is not wise. How a person acts, thinks and feels really answers the question whether he is wise or unwise.

Action should not be understood as referring merely to the overt acts, the transactions with other people, what we do in the external world in a visible manner. Action is a very large term. There is action taking place of various sorts in the human body, chemical action, electrical action and so forth. We are unconscious of it. There is also the action of thought, of emotion and feeling. There is action at every level of one's being, the action of the total being of man, comprising all levels. Life means action.

The Bread of Life

When we say the truth of things, are not the scientists also engaged in discovering truth? Scientists may send rockets to the moon but science has not succeeded in filling a human heart with what it needs in times of loneliness, pain and suffering. No doubt science is engaged in the quest for truth but it is truth of a formal nature, concerned with the appearance

of things. All that can be discovered by science, by the methods which it pursues, is merely knowledge with regard to the outer casing of Nature, not the inner kernel. It gives us the husk, the composition and properties of the husk; it does not supply us with the bread of life. The truth that is to be identified with life may have a nature that calls for deep penetration if we are to understand it. It may be many-sided; it may have in it great depth; there may be extensions behind the appearance. There is life within the form, and wherever there is life there is consciousness in some manner. Consciousness is such a vast subject opening avenues which include its various modes of action, the different qualities it displays, also the complications it develops in a condition of unawareness. The word consciousness, as well as the word life, denotes something which has extraordinary depths; we know their nature only in the shallows or on the surface. Therefore we do not know much about them. I feel that the work of the Theosophical Society should consist primarily in an understanding of the nature of life as it

is in ourselves, as it is in others, in plants, in animals, everywhere, the one Life, of which the great Teachers have spoken, and in understanding the nature of consciousness which is interblended with life and is really an aspect of life.

There are various aspects to be explored but this exploration has to be undertaken by oneself, for it is the exploration of one's inner being, which cannot be discovered through the words of another. Talking or communication has its place, but really to explore one has to be in a condition of complete attention, bring oneself into a state of tranquillity, if not stillness. The sea of one's consciousness must remain quiet and still. It is only then we can go down to its bottom, so to say.

Totality of Truth

Theosophy is a wisdom which is based on truth but this truth is manifold, it has several layers, one within the other. One might call it the totality of truth with regard to man, life and the universe. If our actions, thoughts, feelings, responses are all in

harmony with the nature of this totality, then we are wise. One might say this is a very large or tall order; how are we to come to such wisdom? We cannot be impatient about it. In fact when we are impatient it is probably because of an urge to magnify oneself, an urge which comes out of a process that negates the possibility of wisdom. It requires much arduous work to realize this possibility, and we do not like it, we want to arrive at the goal immediately. If somebody can give us a transcendental mantra or something of that sort, which will be like a pill that acts quickly, then that is precisely what we want, and there will be innumerable people running after such a pill.

We have to realize what is needed for an understanding of the total truth. The second Object of the Theosophical Society refers to religion, science and philosophy. Just as there is the word Theosophy, left undefined, so that each individual may feel the call to discover its meaning for himself and spell it out in his own life, so there are these three words, religion, science and philosophy. The qualities that belong to the disciplines they

indicate are all essential for the discovery of truth. A person has to have a mind which is scientific, by which I do not mean he should know much of science. One can be highly scientific in his thinking, that is, logical, precise, accurate, without knowing much of science. What we call science is a lot of information about various things, and when we have collected the information we think we have scientific knowledge, but that is just a collection kept in the brain-box, so to say.

What is needed is a mind which approaches all questions in a spirit of realism, using that word not in any technical sense, but in the spirit of being objective, confronting facts, seeing things as they are. The outstanding quality of the scientific mind is the confrontation of facts steadily without turning in other directions, so that the fact is reflected in the mind exactly as it is. This scientific quality gives rise to others. Presently we come to great precision in definition, in understanding, we see the sequence of facts and the order which comprises those facts. All these activities of the scientific mind arise from

seeing the fact as fact, or to use the words of the Lord Buddha: 'Seeing the true as true and the false as false.'

A Polished Mirror

When we say 'confronting the facts' it does not mean confronting the facts at the physical level only, but also the psychological facts, what takes place in our own minds, our inner reactions and feelings, the motives which propel us into certain courses, which cause us to say certain words, do certain things. Even the greatest scientist is not necessarily objective and scientific in matters other than science. This confrontation of facts means a very great deal; it is holding oneself together, containing oneself, submitting oneself to the discipline of truth, receiving the truth into oneself without going off in side-directions. So the word objective can mean a condition of very great receptivity and depth. One has to be objective with regard to the whole of Nature. It is possible thus to come to an inner condition of *pure* knowing, not mixed up with any notions, in which everything which is external to oneself is reflected in its true

nature in oneself, in that inner condition. One's whole nature can become a polished mirror of truth. If what I am saying is correct, and is not just a poetical fancy, then it is an extraordinary truth to realize. Can we come into a condition where our inner nature, the inner being, becomes so purified, smooth, level, polished, shaped if you like, infused with energy, that it becomes a highly sensitized film that reflects the truth of things at whatever level? I believe it is possible to come to that condition. Without claiming to have come to it, one can understand the possibility of such a change in oneself.

When we move into the realm of religion we seem to have left behind us the domain of certainty and objectivity and come into a land where everyone is free to think anything however fanciful and believe what he likes, a kind of twilight region. Is that religion? I think religion to be valid must be an aspect of truth; but then we have to understand the nature of this aspect. Religion is usually thought of as adherence to a set of beliefs and practices claiming the allegiance of individuals, with certain authorities, codes and

penalties, the discipline which it exacts from its followers, but so long as religion is of that sort one religion must be in conflict with another.

But there is in man a nature which underlies the superficial activity of the mind, the various ideas it invents. The truly religious man, to whatever religion he may belong, or even if he professes no religion at all, acts with that fundamental nature. How can this be described or defined? It is very difficult to define anything correctly. We can use a few words and call it a definition but that may not be a real definition. This underlying nature is the same in all, being an unbroken homogeneous base, of the very substance of consciousness, however diversified may be the nature that is met with on the surface. When unbroken it has its own characteristic forms of action.

Total Response

What is most characteristic of every religion? Apart from the superficial differences, there is one characteristic, the religious spirit or attitude, which expresses itself in a

form of complete giving. It is a spirit that gives itself totally without reservation, whether to an ideal or truth or whatever else may attract it. There is a total response from the being of the man to some image of beauty that fills his heart. It is this giving of oneself completely, in a spirit of self-abnegation, self-surrender, which characterizes the deeply religious man. When a man is truly religious and gives himself, he does not, so to say, divide his nature into two parts, saying: 'This part is myself, and that part I will share with others.' There is no such division in his nature or in his consciousness. This is the nature of all religious devotion; the whole nature of the person responds and rises towards that ideal, object, truth, principle, image or beauty; and there is in that attraction a complete absence of self.

It may be said, if this is religious devotion, do we not find the same phenomenon in love, just human love? When one person loves another, love is very often possessive and there is a great deal of oneself in it, much reservation. It is often based on a kind of contract, it seeks a quid pro quo, there is an unspoken

bargain. But if the love is devoid of all this, then would it not really amount to a total giving of oneself, expecting no return at all, not even pleasure? Yes, of course, and if there is such love in the heart of a person, he is truly religious. He may profess no religion, he may have no belief, he may not have a name for any deity, but still if there is the giving, the action is there, and that surely is religion. One might say that religion consists in the action of the total being of man, of a nature that radiates a certain light in which what is beautiful in the object of love or the object of devotion is perceived. This light illuminates a hidden beauty in the interior being of the other person, the object, whatever it may be. If there is such love, then it is the action of that underlying nature of man, which is unbroken, which is not only a mirror of truth (these similes are all partial, one should not press them too hard), but is capable of certain forms of action which take place from within. This action fills the person with a happiness, an ecstasy, not present in other conditions. Except in such giving of oneself one cannot experience that unearthly

joy, the fragrance which springs from within, which is like no earthly fragrance.

Dimensionless Point

Then there is philosophy. Philosophy is really a system of thought based upon actual facts, the facts of physical Nature as well as the facts pertaining to the psychic being of man. The facts which we perceive are ordered in a certain way; a certain structure of thought is built up, which is in harmony with those facts, which explains those facts, and reveals the relations between them. The activity taking place in what we call philosophy is like constructing a noble piece of architecture. The architecture has to stand on the ground of truth or facts, and suit the ground and harmonize with it.

What we call truth has all these different aspects. It is truth that extends from the centre that is within one's innermost being to the periphery, the outer limits of the world he lives in or perhaps the universe. Since it covers such an extraordinary range, there are different sections, different aspects of truth. Theosophy, so far as we are concerned,

means an understanding in which there is a measure of harmony among these different aspects. How can we know this extraordinary expanse of truth, which is limitless, which has so many aspects, some of them subtle, profound, beyond our ken? Is it possible to know this truth which seems absolutely beyond us in every direction? I think there is only one way of coming to it, and that way, paradoxically enough, is in coming to the very centre of one's being, a standpoint which commands all the horizons at all the levels. That centre of being is dimensionless, like a geometrical point. The person then does not try to expand himself and embrace many things but reduces himself, so to say, and becomes at that point the pure knower. The whole universe can be divided into two parts, that aspect which is to be known and that which is the knower. The knower is the centre, that which is to be known is the expanse on all sides, the continuum of facts.

There is that extraordinary faculty of pure knowing—call it Buddhi if you like—which is true intelligence as distinguished from mere intellect. It is possible for it to know,

or at least begin to know in truth, not merely see things as they appear, but to know them as they inwardly are. That requires a change in oneself. One has to come to that condition in which one seeks nothing, one does not try to conquer worlds, one has given up every attempt at self-magnification. When we remain wherever we are but in such a condition of receptivity, of humility, the truth from every side pours into our hearts.

We sometimes speak of Buddhi as intuition. It is a Sanskrit word, but we do not quite know what it means. We use so many terms, Ātma, Buddhi, Paramātma, Para-brahman, and what not—this has been done in India—but in spite of all this flourish with words, the person comprehends very little; he merely plays with the words as one might play with counters on a table. First you must know the action which takes place within the being of man, the quality it has, then you can give whatever name you like to it; the name does not matter very much. Similarly, you must know the Divine Wisdom and then it does not matter whether you call it Theosophy or Brahma Vidya, or

by any other name; what is important is to know it.

Sometimes it is said that we are in a transition time and we have to move from kama-manas, the mind which is influenced by desire, to Buddhi-manas, the mind which is truly enlightened, which is able to perceive, and it is this perception which is more important than thought. One must first perceive either at the physical level or any of the inner levels, then one can build upon it a system of thought. The change that has to take place is that the intellect which merely plays with ideas has to be so changed, so enlightened, infused with a certain pure quality, that it becomes an insrtument of the pure Knower and is not just the crude intellect which merely works out various sequences of facts. It has to be an intellect which knows the quality of a thing, and does not merely deal with quantities and numbers by comparison. Sometimes people quote from one of the Mahatma letters: 'The crest wave of intellectual advance must be taken hold of and guided into spirituality.' How can you lead an intellect which is dogmatic, neutral with regard to

moral issues, incapable of any aesthetic appreciation, an intellect which is cold and hard, into spirituality? It has to be first melted, transformed and shaped into a pliable and sensitive instrument which can probe the inner truth of things. It becomes then an extension of the Spirit belonging to that nature of man which is essentially a nature of love, of openness, and sensitivity, non-egoistic and non-possessive. The intelligence of such a nature is luminous and penetrating. Also, when this nature manifests itself, life assumes an extraordinarily beautiful aspect; all quarrels, resentments and grudges come to an end. Then each man will meet all others as brothers in truth. In this way alone there can be a new era, a new world.